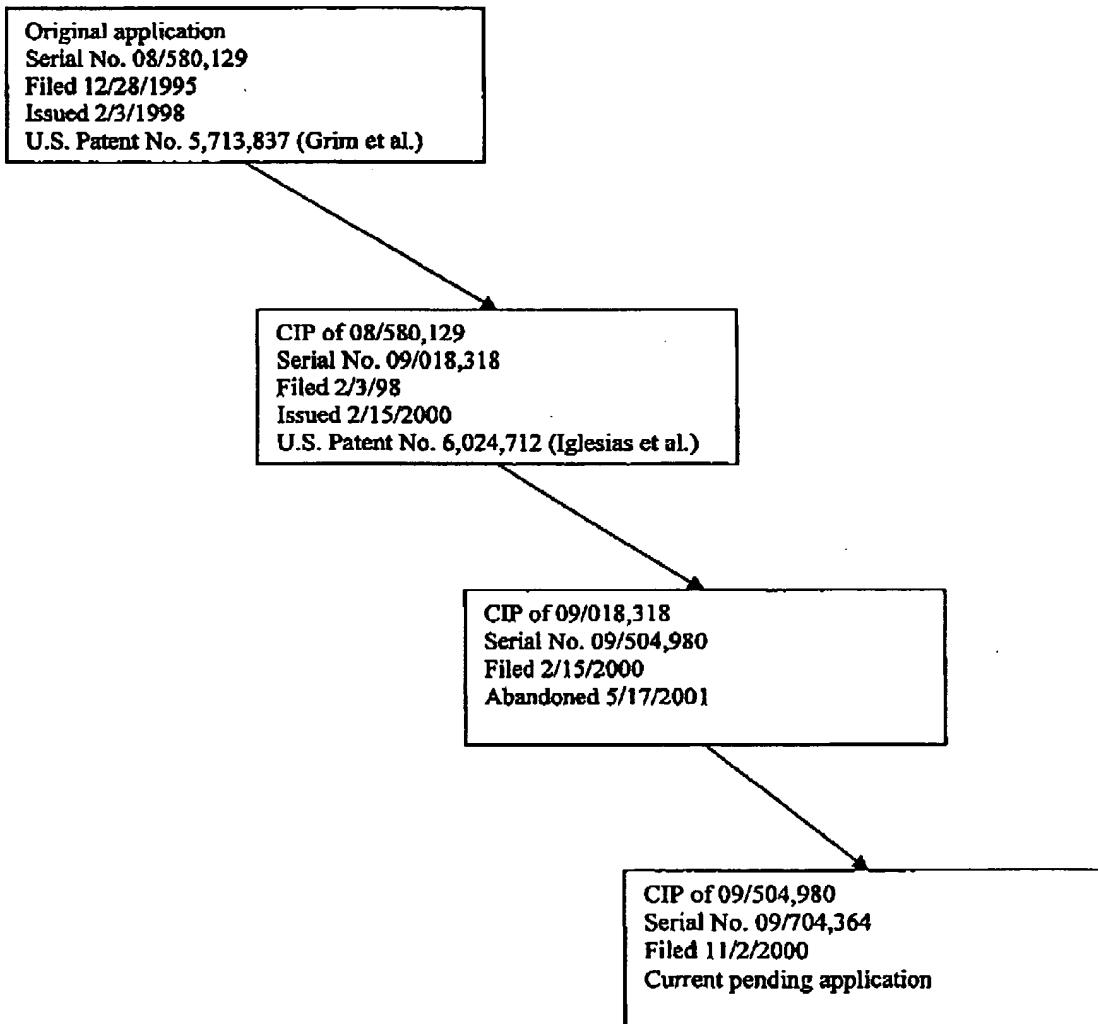


REMARKS

This amendment to the specification attempts to clarify the family of related applications identified in the specification under the caption, "RELATED APPLICATIONS." The continuing applications were co-pending with the parent when filed and had at least one common co-inventor (namely, T. Grim and J. Iglesias). The continuing data can be verified using information available in the Patent Office. Based on applicant's research of its own records, the continuing data should be as follows:



Please enter the above amendment to clarify the parentage and continuing data. The Commissioner is authorized to charge deposit account no. 06-2425 for any unforeseen fees arising from the filing of this paper. Please direct any questions to the undersigned.

Respectfully submitted,

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I. RELATED APPLICATIONS

~~This is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 08/580,129, which was filed December 28, 1995, of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/018,318, which was filed February 3, 1998, and of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/504,980, which was filed on February 15, 2000, all of which are incorporated by reference herein.~~

II. BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**A. Field of the Invention**

10 The present invention relates to orthopedic supports and, more particularly, to an orthopedic support that has a molded exo-structure.

B. Prior Art

15 There are a number of known ways to stiffen fabric orthopedic supports for injured parts of the anatomy. U.S. Patent No. 4,724,847, for example, discloses an ankle brace that has a plurality of pockets. Rigid stay members are inserted into the pockets to form a rigid structure that surrounds and immobilizes the ankle. U.S. Patent Nos. 3,298,365, 4,280,488, 4,825,856, and 4,440,158, among others, disclose similar arrangements.

20 A drawback of these designs is that they require a great deal of labor to construct. Workers must be hired to cut many separate pieces of fabric, sew the supports together, insert the rigid stays and so on. A further drawback is that the stays are typically die-cut from plastic of constant thickness. The shape of the stays is therefore quite limited, and the final support often does not fit the anatomy perfectly. While stays can be manufactured to have a particular contour, the manufacturing process is not simple and is often fairly expensive.

25 Efforts have been made outside of the orthopedic support art to create stiffened, custom-shaped objects by injecting hardenable material into a mold in which fabric has been placed. For example, European Patent Application No. 89103277.3, which the EPO published on February 24, 1989 as publication number 0 332 899, discloses a diaphragm formed by injection molding plastic onto a piece of fabric. The diaphragm acts as a pressure barrier in an automobile engine. European Patent Application No. 87101406.4, published on February 3, 1987 as publication no. 30 0 234 341, discloses creating fiber reinforced structures for automobiles. Fibrous material is placed into a mold, and then resin is injected into the mold. The resin saturates the fabric and